

# Intelligent <sup>p</sup> Clearanc

by Bill Parks



***First as an industry we have to look at and understand what Traffic Incident Management is, how Traffic Incident Management has and will impact our industry, what we as an industry can do to be compliant and why the Federal Highway Administration is showing a growing concern to expand Incident Management concepts.***

**T**raffic Incident Management is by no means a new concept. Many of these programs have been in existence for twenty or so years, generally confined to urban areas. As growth expands into rural areas so does the need for the expansion of Incident Management concepts.

The whys are quite simple, as a country we have out grown our interstate system. The infrastructure was not designed for the volume of vehicles that is presently dependant on the system. Keep in mind that when the interstate system is blocked, congested or closed the burden of traffic flow spills onto the secondary road system. This secondary road system many times feeds through small

towns and communities, now a ripple effect has been created, congestion becomes so great that the effects can nearly paralyze a community.

Meanwhile, back up on the interstate, every issue of Incident Management is challenged. These issues will vary from quality of air, to the delay of product delivery, manpower cost of people and vehicles sitting or delayed in traffic. Examples are, for every ten minutes that a two-lane interstate is closed due to incident, 4027 gallons of petroleum products are consumed, the estimated cost of an interstate being closed is a conservative one million dollars an hour. Think what these delays cause, air flights get delayed, the work force becomes tardy, on time deliveries to

manufactures become late, and the increasing secondary incident probability increases, therefore setting the stage for personal injury to responders and the motoring public.

The newest effects of this congestion that has become popular and seems to be growing is, Road Rage, when frustration and temperaments combine to create an incident.

One of The Federal Highway Administration solution is to promote efficiency in the operation of our existing highway system, to move more people and vehicles with less delay. To maximize traffic flow, maximize motor public safety and to relieve secondary artery congestion. To achieve these concepts the FHWA identified the stakeholders and

responders and developed a format. This program was labeled Traffic Incident Management. The five basic tasks that were identified was incident detection and verification, inci-

was, Multi-Agency Endorsement of FHWA Incident Management Principals, Outreach and Training. This does include and directed to the towing and recovery industry.



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**E**dent response, incident site management, incident clearance, and motorist information. When the FHWA identified incident clearance as an Incident Management task that should have been when the towing and recovery industry should have come forward to aid the process of forming the program. As I tried to imply earlier in this article, Incident Management is not a new concept. What is new is the idea of multiple responder training, the definition and understanding of all parties involved, including the role of the towing and recovery industry could share in these concepts.

## Some did you know questions:

Did you know that many traffic management systems classify the towing and recovery industry as an "emergency vehicle subsystem," and that we are considered one of the greatest resources of any responder groups. A spokesman for FHWA stated that through early detection/early response, only minutes can be eliminated in an incident, but by using the proper towing and recovery company, hours may be eliminated at an incident.

Our role in Traffic Incident Management has been defined, our presence as an industry is depended on and required. The towing and recovery industry has an opportunity here, how or what we do with this is up to us.

Part of a recent document of FHWA involvement, under the heading of Proposed Projects, Immediate-Term Projects, number six of a long list

The FHWA, DOT, ITS and so on are all acronyms, the government loves acronyms. They form a language all their own just using acronyms. So, understanding the need for our industry involvement and wanting our industry to take a pro-active approach to Traffic Incident Management, I have written a format with an acceptable acronym of my own; The proper term is Intelligent Clearance Practices (ICP).

The objective of ICP is to bring the towing and recovery industry into the guidelines and requirements of Traffic Incident Management. To enhance tow and recovery personnel and other responders on scene safety, to minimize secondary incident exposure, to ensure motoring public safety, to restore traffic flow and to become compliant with Federal Highway Administration, State Department of Transportation, Uniform Traffic Control and National Highway Institute Programs.

Some of the many advantages for the towing and recovery industry to adopt, promote and adhere to ICP are to minimize liabilities often encountered in highway traffic clearance as it pertains to removal of abandoned, disabled or wrecked vehicles. To gain access to and have input in cross responder training, enhancing the public and professional image of the industry. The towing and recovery industry would progress as a team player in the Incident Management Theater and most likely gain support of many other incident responding agencies progressing into legislative understanding and cooperation.

In the past, the Towing and Recovery industry has had no standards of

uniformity on issues of traffic control, vehicle placement, scene lighting, vehicle lighting or responder attire. Through ICP best practices the towing and recovery industry would achieve suggested guidelines for these issues.

To better understand the need for Intelligent Clearance Practices the industry should familiarize themselves with the importance of their role as part of the Incident Management responders. This quote is taken out of the November 2000, *Traffic Incident Management Handbook*, prepared for and distributed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). "Towing and recovery companies that respond to highway incidents are indispensable components of all Incident Management programs." With the importance of our existence identified by FHWA and DOTs it is time that the towing and recovery industry becomes proactive in meeting the existing guidelines and even develop new guidelines as they pertain to Incident Management and the towing and recovery industry. 🚚

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